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Marines Have Landed

WASHINGTON
At a Cabinet meeting two years ago, when chief of staff James Baker disagreed with Treasury Secretary Donald Regan on some minor matter, Mr. Regan turned to Secretary of State George Shultz and murmured, "He was only a lieutenant."

In World War II, Regan was a lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps, and Shultz a captain (later a major in the reserves); in the 50's James Baker, 10 years their junior, left active duty as a first lieutenant, which limits his camaraderie with field-grade brass.

Now the three former leathernecks are three-fourths of the Power Quartet for the second Reagan term. The fourth member of the Power Quartet, Defense Secretary Weinberger, is personally closest to the President, but as an ex-Army captain is not in the elite "club."

The switch of jobs between Treasury Secretary Regan and chief of staff Baker suddenly illuminates the goings-on of the last two weeks. Let us, as they say at the C.I.A., retrace the analysis:

William Clark, the miscast former national security adviser who has been parked at Interior for the last year, evidently sought to learn if he was destined to take over as White House chief of staff; when disabused of this likelihood, he told the President he wanted to go home and Mr. Reagan did not try to dissuade him.

Although he denies it now, Michael Deaver also had hopes he could take over the top White House job. He could claim 18 years of proven loyalty, and had the strong support of Nancy Reagan, with whom he had forced out both Mr. Clark and Richard Allen. But Jim Baker and the President knew that the job required more substance than imageer Deaver could offer, and no signal came from Mr. Reagan to encourage his suit. Before Mr. Deaver took the Baker-Regan plan to the President, he announced his departure; in that way, it would appear that he had not been rejected — but of course, he had been.

The President decided that neither of his longtime California aides was qualified to be the general manager of his Administration. That was why he seized on the Regan idea of a switch.

Thus, although the President is being derided as "the last to know," his role was not totally that passive; he kept saying no until the right man volunteered. This read-my-mind leadership style is certainly different from that of President Nixon — whose second term began with a demand for resignations, citing Disraeli's description of Gladstone as an "exhausted volcano" — but the result is a reshuffle all the more refreshing for seeming voluntary.

Will the big switch, and the concurrent departure of the disappointed cronies, make a difference?

Yes. One economic-policy fact is that Donald Regan is far less worried about deficits and less likely to turn to tax increases than is James Baker; at the center of power, Mr. Regan will be calling most of the supply-side shots. At Treasury, Mr. Baker is expected to take a great interest in international matters, and will shine at the Bonn summit conference this May — but the Reagan-Regan "growth" philosophy, which lowers inflation and tolerates deficits, is more than ever in place.

In foreign affairs, the centrality of Mr. Regan is an important new asset for George Shultz. The two men have known and admired each other all their adult lives; at Merrill Lynch, manager Regan consulted Chicago economist Shultz; when the Shultzes returned to Washington to search for a house, they lived with the Regans. Unlike the satellitic Deaver and Clark, they are men whose success in life has not been dependent on princely favor. Mr. Regan is unswervingly loyal, Mr. Shultz independently loyal; both grow stronger in the second half.

This does not mean that the somewhat different Weinberger-William Casey *Weltanschauung* will have no hearing. President Reagan may pro-

fess to want harmony, but we see how he invites internal competition. As his Law of the Sea and space-defense decisions demonstrated, he is capable of disdaining the staff-directed, difference-splitting "option three" and coming down on the side of his group of advisers who seem to be in eclipse.

What the landing of Reagan's Marines means is this: (1) Economic policy hangs tough on spending curbs and tax reform while foreign policy probes for openings. (2) In the natural selection of White House aides, the fittest survive. (3) The way the President shook up his second-term team could be sheer dumb luck but is more likely a masterpiece of inductive management. □